

Gospel Shaped Unity of Church

1 Corinthians 1:10-2:5

[Introduction]

[Read the Passage]

[Pray]

A thought exercise on Church conflicts

I wanted to start today with a **couple questions**. And in response to these questions, no one needs to raise their hands or stand up to give an answer. Instead just store an answer in your minds for them as we will need to recover it a few times during the course of the day

And my questions for you are these:

(1) **Have you ever been part of a church that split?** Maybe you were part of the group that left, or the group that stayed behind? Maybe it wasn't a whole group. Maybe it was just one person, or one family, who left because of a conflict or a hurt they couldn't get past. Have you ever experienced such a split in any church you were part of?

And as you answer that question for yourself, here is my second question:

(2) **Why do you think churches split?** OR Why do you think people leave churches?

Is disunity and conflict in church an issue?

I think for most of us, if not all of us, the unfortunate answer to the first question is Yes.

We have either been part of a church split, or we know people who left a church because of some conflict or hurt. Church conflicts, which often lead to churches splitting or people leaving a church, are very common. And it is not just our anecdotal experiences that show this to us.

In the year 2000, for example, a group called Faith Communities Today **surveyed over 14,000 congregations in the United States. And they found out that 75% of them had experienced some significant conflict in the last 5 years.** That is a staggering number.

About 22 years later, Barna Group did a survey of about 1200 Christians. And they wanted to know where these Christians experienced the most unity and cohesion in their life with others.

Only about one third of them responded with church as such a place. Friendships outside church scored much higher.

The picture I am trying to paint is that **churches find it really hard to not let conflicts tear at the unity of their congregation.** And this is not a uniquely 21st century or even an American phenomenon.

In fact from the passage we just read, in Paul's appeal to the Corinthian church in 1 Cor 1:10, we see **his deep concern over the various conflicts** that are just tearing this first century church apart.

When I read this passage, I try to imagine the deep anguish with which Paul makes this appeal to a church that he planted and worked so hard to establish: *"I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment."*

The fragility of church unity, and the constant presence of conflicts within the congregation is **not a modern or even just a medieval reality.** From the very beginning, right here in the NT churches, we are starting to see conflicts and factions starting to form.

On the one hand, reading about what's happening in the Corinthian church, or the Jerusalem church, or the church in Antioch, and in the churches in Galatia, Philippi and Colossae is **actually kind of demoralizing.** These are the very first expressions of Christ's church on earth. You would think that they are the ideals for us to follow. **You would think that they have to set an example for us on how to pursue unity within congregations.** But instead they seem to be more full of divisions, factions and conflicts, than some of our contemporary churches.

And so when we read passages such as these. And passages such as Acts 6 where the very first church in Jerusalem is facing accusations of racial neglect in the care the congregation provided to the Widows. **It is easy to look at that and lose confidence in the ability of the Church of Christ to ever find unity.** Maybe it is a lost cause.

After all, how can we the 21st century church do any better than these NT churches that had the direct witness and instruction of Jesus' disciples and apostles?

The Bible doesn't whitewash this reality of first century church life. The authors of these NT letters and narratives could have hid the conflicts. The early church could have removed these letters and narratives from the Biblical canon in order to present a unified, conflict-free image of the early Church to you and me. But they don't. They keep it.

And the reason, I think, they kept it is because in the very same pages where we read about these conflicts, **God has in His mercy and grace also shown the answer to true unity and peace within His Church.**

So as we study the rest of this chapter, it is not going to be merely some historical exercise to learn of all the challenges to unity in the early church. No, we are going to mine here. And mine deep. Because here we are going to find out that: church unity is not ultimately achieved through a shared culture or a common cause. **Lasting unity comes only as each believer pursues oneness with Christ.** And it is Christ's indwelling presence, not our effort, that makes Christ's church perfectly one.

The disunity in Corinthian Church

So, back to this passage, what is causing disunity in the Corinthian Church? There is a lot, but for today we will focus on the two causes of disunity addressed in the passage we read this morning.

Paul talks about the first cause of disunity in 1 Cor 1:11-12:

For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. ¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

The first cause of disunity in the Corinthian church seems to be this division caused by members following certain leaders over others. And it is not just limited to that, because if it was just some saying "hey we prefer the teaching style of Paul over Apollos", or "we prefer listening to what Cephas or Peter has to say over Paul", that would have been just a matter of personal preferences. But it seems like this is a sort of division of allegiance between members of the church. And it is a serious kind of division, **because it is leading to quarrels or actually fighting within the congregation.**

And as this issue stands, there is a second cause of division in the Corinthian Church that Paul brings up in 1 Cor 1:14-15:

I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so that no one may say that you were baptized in my name.

Apparently some in the church are making claims of being super Christians, on the basis of who baptized them. **They thought of themselves as Christians with superior heritage**, first among equals, because of who baptized them into the faith. And this seems to be further exacerbating the existing divisions in the Corinthian church.

You can imagine the situation here for yourself: **what if there was a group of people at Mercy Hill who went around claiming, implicitly or explicitly, that hey we have a more superior heritage here than everyone else because Pastor Nick baptized them?** You can imagine what a contentious and divisive claim that will be. And how some in the congregation will feel marginalized and hurt if such claims went unchallenged.

This is what was going on in the Corinthian church. Allegiances were divided between various leaders on the basis of their ability to preach the gospel well or on the basis of their authority as the direct Apostles of Jesus Christ. And some were even using the fact that these leaders baptized them as a basis to claim superiority within the congregation.

Paul is not hesitant to address these issues in the church head on. But **he doesn't get at it from a "this is not the morally right thing to do" argument. Instead, he preaches the Gospel.** More specifically he first shows how the Gospel doesn't leave any room for the Corinthians to split up along the lines they are dividing themselves over.

These divisions are an anathema to the Gospel

From 1 Corinthians 1:18 onwards Paul presents the Gospel to the Corinthian believers in a way that answers two very critical questions:

1. First, from the Gospel Paul answers the question: **"What convinces us about the truth of the Gospel?"**
2. And second, he answers the question: **"Who does the Gospel save?"**

To find Paul's answer to the first question we will focus on two sections of this morning's passage: 1 Cor 1:18-25 & 1 Cor 2:1-5.

If you read through 1 Cor 1:18-25, Paul is making a very simple point: ***The gospel is foolishness to those that perish. But to those that God saves, it is the power of God and the wisdom of God that leads to their salvation.***

In other words the Gospel is **two different things to two different groups of people**. The content of the gospel message doesn't change. But how it is perceived and received is radically different.

I want us to think back to what it was about the Gospel message that convinced you about the saving work of Jesus Christ. Was it because it was a superior philosophical argument? Maybe? Was it because the death and resurrection of Christ as the basis of your salvation made so much logical sense? Probably? **But was that the primary reason you placed your faith in Christ's work on the cross?** Or was there something more?

BTW, I think that the Gospel is the most superior philosophical argument on the condition of humanity and their relationship with God. And the salvific claims it makes about Jesus and the cross makes complete logical sense. **But what is something intrinsic about the gospel message that had first convinced you and me about its truth? I think most Christians would struggle to give an answer to this question.**

And I think the more challenging question for me personally over the years has been, that if I have concluded that the Gospel is both philosophically and logically more superior than all other

paths to salvation, **why have so many people who are much smarter and logically more sound than me not seen it that way.**

And honestly this is something I think about everyday, because I am constantly in rooms where there are so many bright people, capable of much more superior logical reasoning than me. Not that such a room is really hard to find. **But rarely are the people in these rooms also as convinced about the truth and superiority of the Gospel as I am.** Should that make me wonder: *Maybe I am wrong about the gospel?* Should that make me ask this question: *How is it that I got the gospel right, when so many people much smarter than me are getting it wrong?*

Paul's answer to this question is vs. 18: ***For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.***

See according to Paul, my previous line of questioning is wrong. Because my question is based on the **assumption that I got the Gospel right, My mind with my wisdom figured it out,** and that is the reason that I was saved.

According to Paul though, the reality is the other way around. **I am being saved, hence the Gospel is the power of God in my life.** And this power of God is what transforms me to see the truth of the Gospel and enables me to put my trust in Jesus Christ.

It is not my wisdom, my knowledge, my ability to debate and reason through various philosophies of the world that leads me to conclude that the Gospel is the truth about God. Rather it is Christ "the power of God and the wisdom of God" **who in order to save me, intervenes to tear off the scales off my eyes, so that now I can place my faith in the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Paul clarifies this further in vs. 21, when he says: **"...in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom"**

I cannot claim to have faith, because I arrived at it through logical or philosophical reasoning, where my mind or my wisdom was the first mover that led me to my faith.

Rather God is the first mover, and it is the power of God that led me to see the beauty of the cross and delight in the truths of the Gospel. **God moved first in my heart, to turn it from a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, so that now when I look at the gospel I see the truth of what Christ did for me on the cross.**

He suffered what I should suffer, He died the death that I should die, He rose again so that I can conquer death and sin. And His righteousness is sufficient to make me, a wretched sinner, to be found justified before an infinitely holy God, through my faith in the saving work of His Son. **And this I know and believe because of the power of God that saves me, not my own wisdom, has made it clear and true for me.**

Some do come to faith through a path that involves intellectual pursuits. And some do come to faith through apologetic ministries. So Paul is not saying here to abandon the intellectual pursuits of the Gospel. But he is saying that those pursuits are not the primary cause of how faith is produced in your heart. **Our heart is so corrupt, that God has to first intervene. And without that first move by God, not even Albert Einstein can be convinced of the truth of the Gospel.**

Paul, once again, reinforces this in 1 Cor 2:1-5, by making the point that he didn't come to them with lofty speech and wisdom. He didn't even come to them presenting himself as some powerful, courageous, "look at my abilities" kind of representative of the Gospel. Rather he came in his "weakness, and in fear and much trembling". What Paul is trying to show here is that **it is neither the high logic of the Gospel message that saves, nor the capability and power of its preacher that saves. Your faith doesn't rest in either.**

It rests in the power of God alone. So Paul, instead of relying on the lofty wisdom in his message or demonstrating great power in his own person, prefers to demonstrate to the Corinthians the power of God through the Holy Spirit. As it was the Holy Spirit who opened their eyes to the truth, the wisdom and the superiority of the Gospel message. Not Paul. Not Apollos. Not Peter. God did the work of convincing your and my sinful and darkened hearts regarding the truth of the Gospel. **And maybe God did this work through a preacher, or an apologist or a friend or a family member, but that work was not done by them.**

Can I encourage you to look back at your own faith journeys? Especially that moment when you were convinced of the cross and the gospel? How much of that faith you saw grow in your heart was a result of a person's influence or a convincing argument alone? **How much of that moment is attributable instead to a mysterious work in your heart that can be attributable to God alone?**

If you are here, and you don't know Jesus as your savior yet, but are experiencing such a movement in your heart where Christ's work on the cross becomes more and more true, to the extent your heart is being challenged to either receive or reject this truth, this is God working in your heart to draw you to Himself. Don't be apathetic to this work of God. Today might be the day He is calling you to respond in faith. And if so don't leave here without addressing that calling in your heart. **One of us is always delighted to talk it through with you at the end of this service.**

Coming back to Paul's argument here, if you have been following with me so far, it points to a serious problem in the Corinthian Church. Well "problem" is an understatement, because if Paul is right **there is a serious SIN in the life of the Corinthian church that is directly responsible for their disunity.** And this is the reason Paul simply doesn't handwave away the divisions caused in the Corinthian church as a moral issue alone. Because for Paul the issue is not just that they are following these leaders with too much devotion and love.

For Paul **the issue is that they are attributing the work of God to men**. The Corinthian church had it all wrong. They thought they were saved by the effective preaching of Paul. They thought they were saved by Apollos' eloquence. They thought they were saved by Peter's authoritative first hand witness of Jesus' suffering death on the cross.

But the reality is that these three men and their preaching styles, their backgrounds and their leadership styles is not what led to the Corinthians having faith in the Gospel. It is the power of God that accomplished that. **So in ascribing that accomplishment to the preachers who brought the Gospel to them, they are ascribing to man credit and praise that only God deserves.**

Paul clearly states this later in 1 Cor 3:5-7: "***What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, as the Lord assigned to each. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. ⁷ So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth***"

For Paul, when it comes to the Corinthians receiving the Gospel and trusting in Jesus, the preachers are not the crucial element, God Himself is. Hence only He deserves all their allegiance and praise.

Now what is a word for when we give allegiance and praise to man in a way that only God deserves? **It is idolatry.**

Idolatry is giving to something created, which in the Corinthian case is the preachers who brought them the gospel, the allegiance only the Creator deserves. Tim Keller, in his book *Counterfeit Gods*, defines an idol as anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God does, anything you look to for what only God can give. By that measure, Western civilization hasn't abandoned idolatry at all. We've just abandoned its *shape*.

Few people still bow to Zeus or Athena, but the impulse hasn't gone anywhere. We just build subtler idols: career, relationships, control itself. **An idol is something we make, so worshipping it lets us worship our own hands. It's a way of replacing God's sovereignty with the illusion that we're in charge, even over our own souls.**

And this is what was happening in Corinth. They had abandoned their idol deities. But in idolizing the preachers who brought the Gospel to them, the Corinthians were mounting a kind of rebellion against God's sovereignty over their soul. And it is this sin of idolatry that is tearing apart the Corinthian church.

In the same vein, the second issue that was causing division in the Corinthian church was also not some mere flaunting of spiritual heritage. **It is a deep and ignorant pride about something that is not even true.**

Because while the Corinthians were arguing about who was superior on account of who baptized them, Paul clarifies in 1 Cor 1:26-31, that the basis of their calling has nothing to do with them. In fact **it is because they are utterly unqualified according to worldly standards that God chose them.**

I am imagining what the reaction in the Corinthian church was when this portion of the letter was read out loud to them. Because this is what it would have sounded like to them: *“Listen Corinthians, by all worldly standards you are the lowest of low. You are some of the weakest in the society. And you are some of the most foolish in the society. But actually that kind of worked in your favor, **because here was God looking for some weak fools to save, and He found you.**”*

Especially for the Corinthians walking around all conceited because Peter or Apollos baptized them, this would have been shocking, to say the least. **Paul had already established with them that it was neither their wisdom nor their power, or the wisdom and power of the ones that preached the Gospel to them that was the primary mover of their faith in Christ.**

But here in this passage, chapter 1:26-30, Paul is taking this argument even further. So far he had just said that your wisdom didn’t save you. Your power didn’t save you. And so you have nothing to boast about. But here he is saying that it is your qualification as a fool, weak and lowly person that has led to God’s work in you to save you. **All the reasons the world uses to disqualify you God uses to qualify you.** And once again God’s purpose for operating this way in our salvation is “so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.” (vs. 29).

No one can stand before God and say: **“It is so good that I figured out the truth of the Gospel with my wisdom, and my superior reasoning, otherwise God - you won’t have been able to save me.”**

Again this is showing us that the second cause of division in the Corinthian church, their pride in their spiritual heritage, is not merely a moral failure. It is an affront to the gospel. According to Paul, the Corinthians who engaged with such a sense of pride in their spiritual heritage were first and foremost boasting in the presence of God. The very thing the Gospel doesn’t leave any room for.

The Corinthians were not primarily sinning against their fellow believers. They were sinning against God. The pride and idolatry that was tearing them apart was a result of their Church life drifting far away from what Gospel shaped church life looks like. The Corinthian church had conflicts and divisions because the Corinthian church was not living out the Gospel.

What causes divisions in the Church?

I began today with two questions. My first question was if you had ever observed splits in a church caused by conflicts. I am convinced most of you, if not all of you answered that question in the affirmative.

My second question was: **What are the reasons churches split?**

When we try to answer a question like that, **it is so tempting to conclude that some behavioral or cultural issue is what ultimately causes divisions.** But more often than not it is our heart's posture towards the Gospel and the misaligned shape of our Church life that causes such divisions.

This is the hardest part of this sermon for me, that I wrote and rewrote a few dozen times. Because **I wanted to really explain what I mean here without bringing my own life into the mix, but the Lord just won't let me.**

As a lot of you know, Kait and I are fairly new to Mercy Hill. Before Mercy Hill, we were at a different church in the area, that was doctrinally solid with good teaching and worship. But from the first day we were in that church **we sensed a distance between ourselves and the rest of the congregation that was really hard to overcome.** And this was the only reason we left our previous congregation.

I don't want to go into why we felt so lonely in our previous church, because it will mostly just be speculation. But as I was preparing for this sermon I went through some journal entries from that period in our life, especially the last of the about four years we were members there, **and I sensed a root of bitterness and a sense of pride that had crept into my heart.**

I have talked about how we left the church with many spiritually mature people of God, including the Pastors here, and I am quite convinced that Kait and I left that church well. **But that doesn't discount the fact that I didn't always respond to the challenges we faced there in the most Gospel shaped way.** I didn't always guard my heart's responses when faced with hurts and bitterness.

And I could easily reflect on that and say that I felt bitter and felt superior as a response to how some people in that congregation made me feel. Or I can move on from that season in my life with the conclusion it was a cultural issue that the church needed to take care of. And, in all fairness, maybe the members of the Corinthian church who bragged about being baptized by Paul did so because others made them feel inferior in some ways. But Paul doesn't address their pride as a behavioral issue. **He addresses their heart posture in relation to the Gospel, not their behavior in relation to their circumstances.**

I couldn't be bitter against my brothers and sisters despite how some of them made us feel. Because in being bitter I am holding onto unforgiveness. And the cross doesn't leave any room for such unforgiveness.

I should not have developed a sense of superiority towards the brothers and sisters at my previous church, even if it was in response to perceived slights. Because one I don't know if those slights were real or perceived. But more importantly, **what I do know is that Christ's**

love for me and for them is so real and His work in saving me and them is such an undeserved mercy of such high value that it doesn't leave any room for spiritual or theological pride.

So even though we left the church well, not in a hurry, not without proper consultations and conversation with the elders there, and not without seeking God's will in the whole thing with much prayer. **I still had to in the reflection of the Gospel, catch where my heart responded in the wrong ways, and seek repentance from them.**

Divisions and conflicts will rise in every church. But in the midst of it, the questions we often miss to ask is, **how is my sinful nature influencing the way I handle this conflict?** If I hold the gospel mirror in front of myself, what are the things I am getting wrong. **Hope for unity in divisions lay at the end of such careful gospel self-introspection.**

And I am glad James agrees with this when he reminds the church in his letter's chapter 4:1: ***"What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions^[a] are at war within you?"***

Sometimes it makes sense to leave a church. It in itself is not sin. And other times it makes sense to stay and fight for unity within the body of Christ. In both cases though, can we, as James reminds us, ask the question: ***How does the passions at war within me contribute to these divisions and disunity? Without that self-reflection, we'll keep looking for the source of division everywhere but in our own hearts.***

Paul is telling us: whenever we see conflict or distance: in church, family, or friendships—**our first move shouldn't be to find fault with others.** It should be to stand before the mirror of the Gospel and in its reflection examine our own hearts.

If the Gospel never shows us what's wrong in ourselves, we haven't truly understood it.

And if we find ourselves constantly criticizing others while never turning that same scrutiny inward, it's worth asking: has the Gospel actually begun its work in us?

The Gospel exists first to expose our own sin and our need for Christ's saving work on the cross, not to expose others' sin, and certainly not to help us point out others' faults in ways that don't lead them toward repentance.

How to respond to divisions in the Church?

It might be a Christian cliché, but the best response to all problems in life is the Gospel.

Recently when I was sharing some challenges in my career with a friend, he asked me this very crucial question: "What does it look like to have a gospel shaped career?"

In the same vein, I think the question we need to ask when we are confronted with the inevitable divisions or conflicts in a church is: ***"What does Gospel shaped unity in our church look like?"***

Paul's life with the Corinthian church is a treasure trove of gospel shaped responses to divisions in the church. **And here are three things, that I saw in these letters, that Paul does to deal with the divisions in the Corinthian church**, that we can learn from:

1. He preaches the Gospel. In season or out of season. **Whether people were willing to receive what Paul had to say or not, Paul preached the Gospel.** And the reason it makes sense to always preach the Gospel is because as Paul says in Romans 1:16, the gospel: "is the power of God unto salvation". For those that are being saved, the Holy Spirit will use the gospel to bring about reflections and repentance. And since church disunity is a sin problem, the solution is gospel powered repentance and reconciliation.

So the first thing to do when dealing with divisions: In the midst of it let's preach the gospel, to ourselves first and then to others. This doesn't have to be limited to the pulpit. Preach the Gospel to yourself during your morning devotions or commute. Preach it to yourself in the shower. When meeting for coffee with a fellow brother or sister, **find the path from your conversation about life to the realities of Gospel.** Saturate your families in the truths of what Jesus did and taught. A gospel saturated church is a gospel shaped church.

2. Paul doesn't give up on the church. **If there was ever a church that I wouldn't blame Paul for giving up on, it would be the Corinthian church.** Like, if I read Paul writing to the Philippians: "Guys, with the Corinthians, I tried. But I am done, I am giving up.", my coddled western brain will be like: "that makes sense Paul. You do you. Cutting off the Corinthians is the right thing to do for your mental health my friend."

Because Paul's relationship with the Corinthian church was arguably the most difficult and emotionally taxing of any he pastored. In addition to the myriad sins that bombarded its spiritual life, **Paul himself became a target within that church.** Many in the church undermined his legitimacy, speaking ability, financial integrity, and even his appearance. He even describes despairing "of life itself" under the weight he carried, partly as a result of what was going on in Corinth.

But in the midst of all of this he doesn't give up. **He persisted, and God showed up and worked in the church through his preaching of the Gospel and his persistent love and care for the Corinthians.** And we see the fruit of this perseverance in 2 Cor 7:11, where Paul himself points out the earnest repentance that is in evidence in the life of the Corinthian church. The timeline between 1 Cor 1:10 and 2 Cor 7:11 is about 1.5 years. In all this time, despite the numerous challenges, hurts and sorrows Paul doesn't give up on the Corinthian church.

And we can learn from this: **Don't easily give up on the church.** And looking back I am so glad that God, in her mercy, helped Kait and I to practice this in our previous church. We didn't leave in a hurry. We talked with a lot of brothers and sisters there. And we approached the decision to leave with a prayer life about it that spanned years.

3. Paul continues to believe that the Corinthian church is a community of saints. Despite all the sin that Paul points out in the Corinthian church he never once revokes their identity as saints. He opens both letters by calling them "sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" and addresses them "with all the saints," **grounding their status not in their behavior but in what Christ had already done for them.**

In Paul's mind the Corinthian church's identity, as secured by Jesus Christ, is separate from its performance. I think often what happens is that when experiencing division or conflict with fellow Christians we forget that they are members of the community of saints. We suddenly start treating them as people who are not part of the same body of Christ. But what could the state of church unity be if you and I could seriously disagree about something without losing sight of the fact that we both have to spend eternity together with Christ?

Can we stop behaving like the Christians we disagree with go to a different heaven than us? Because Christ isn't building two heavens. He really isn't.

Paul was clear about this, the Corinthians were still saints. They needed to hear the gospel, but they continued to be saints.

So the third thing we learn from Paul about dealing with church divisions is that: **Don't forget that the fellow Christian you disagree with is loved by God, is in a process of being sanctified by God, and is just as precious to God as you are. Treat him or her as such.**

Towards a Gospel Shaped Church Unity

Paul gives us a simple yet clear answer for what produces unity in the church. **Lack of church unity is fundamentally a sin problem. And a united church is a gospel shaped church.**

But what does a gospel-shaped church look like? What happens in its member's life so that the gospel unites them in a way nothing else in the world can?

We already saw that most Christians find more unity outside the church than inside it, around work, a cause, a hobby, a team, or even a political party. **So it's tempting to think that the church needs the same thing: a passion project everyone can rally behind.** Many churches today have built themselves around exactly that, hoping a shared cause will produce the cohesion they're missing.

But Jesus didn't think of unity that way. **Neither did he build His church around anything other than Himself.** The night before his crucifixion, he prayed what we now refer to as his high priestly prayer. Listen to Christ's heart for church unity in this prayer, from John 17:20-23:

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one,²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

Notice what Jesus doesn't pray for. **He doesn't pray that his church would rally around a cause.** He prays that they'd be united the way He is united with the Father, by mutual indwelling. The Father is in the Son, the Son is in the Father. Two persons, one life. That's the model.

So for Jesus, church unity isn't manufactured by a shared mission. **It's the overflow of a shared indwelling, Christ in each and every one of us.** When that happens, then the church is united. And then it is free and able to together pursue its singular mission: making the Savior known to the world.

Gospel-shaped unity is pursued one way: pursuing oneness with Christ. **It grows every time we chase sanctification, every time we look a little more like Jesus, every time we pick up our cross and put our flesh to death.** Our unity with each other is directly proportional to our unity with Him. Walk with the Lord, and we will walk with each other. Drift from him, and we will drift from each other.

As we pray and seek unity in Mercy Hill, or if you are a visitor today — in any church you call home, may we pray and seek the presence of Christ's spirit in each and every one of us. For only a church where each and every member prioritizes Jesus and his indwelling presence over all else will find true and lasting unity and cohesion with each other. **Let's look at Jesus, for as He draws us closer to Him, we will be drawn closer to each other.**